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Finances and Revolutionary Responsibilities: Lorient's Municipal Government, 1789-1790

On the 2nd of August 1789, Lorient's permanent committee received word from their deputy to the National Assembly that France's finance minister, Jacques Necker, had been reinstated in office.[1] Widely viewed as the savior of France, Necker's dismissal the previous month had sparked unease and unrest, most visibly in the storming of the Bastille on July 14th.[2] The merchants who dominated Lorient's permanent committee were distraught by his dismissal in part because they were hoping for his support to dismantle the privileges of mercantilism. "At the very instant" that the news was announced, Ledoux, the city's representative of painters, sculptures, and engravers, "entered and offered to the assembly the large portrait of Mr. Necker" for the city hall.[3] After thanking him "from their hearts," the committee immediately wrote to Necker relating their joy at his return and their everlasting friendship.[4]

The next day, they hastily scrawled a letter to their deputy, Joseph Delaville-Leroux, stating emphatically that "we have been waiting with extreme impatience for the return of Mr. Necker, and we are celebrating it tomorrow by inaugurating his portrait which we will carry in triumph to the city hall with an escort" composed of three hundred militiamen from different regiments "and all of our youth."[5] On August 4th, the minutes recorded that "all the corps, military, ecclesiastical, and judiciary, from the cities of Port Louis and Lorient" participated in the "pompous" ceremony celebrating Necker's return and Ledoux's donation.[6]

[1] Archives Municipales (AM) Lorient, BB7, 19.
[2] AM Lorient BB15, 96. Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015: 43-5, 54-7.
[3] AM Lorient BB7, 19. Louis Chaumeil. *Les Journées de 89, d'après DelavilleLeroux, député de Lorient aux États-Généraux: Juillet 89 à Lorient*. Lorient: Imprimiere du Nouvelliste du Morbihan, 1940*:* 92-94.
[4] AM Lorient BB7, 20-21.
[5] AM Lorient BB14, 132.
[6] AM Lorient BB7, 22; BB14, 132.

In their next few letters to Delaville-Leroux, the committee painstakingly recounted their "solemn ceremony regarding the portrait of Monsieur Necker."[7] On August 7th, the committee complained about Delaville-Leroux's "silence" regarding their previous letters and sent Necker another letter.[8] Their impatient need for recognition was highly unusual. Yet their concern over his lack of enthusiasm would prove to be justified. Delaville-Leroux was preoccupied. Led by the Breton Club on the night of August 4, 1789, deputies of the National Assembly surrendered their feudal rights and tax exemptions to the nation on behalf of their constituents.[9] Enthused by the sudden possibility of creating a truly national system of laws, neither Delaville-Leroux nor Necker would ever acknowledge Lorient's celebration.

In early August 1789, both Delaville-Leroux and his constituents in Lorient were struggling to overcome their government's dire financial straits. Like the rest of France, their goals were shaped by their particular local history. The history of Lorient – literally "The East" – was intimately entangled with the French state's mercantilist polices towards the East Indies. It had been founded in 1666 to serve as a company town for the *Compagnie des Indes* (CDI).[10] Throughout the eighteenth-century, Lorient had the privilege of being the sole legal port of entry for ships returning from the East Indies (a status known as the *port de retours*).[11] Beginning in 1785, the third iteration of this mercantilist body, the *Nouvelle Compagnie des Indes* (NCDI) had

[7] AM Lorient BB14, 135.
[8] AM Lorient BB14, 137.
[9] This night is often referred to as the abolition of feudalism. Michael P. Fitzsimmons, *The Night the Old Regime Ended: August 4, 1789, and the French Revolution* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.
[10] Louis Chaumeil. « Abrégé d'histoire de Lorient de la fondation (1666) à nos jours (1939). » *Annales de Bretagne*, 46: 1 (1939): 70, 75. To understand this phenomenon of purpose-built cities, refer to James C. Scott. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998: 85-180.
[11] Gérard Le Bouëdec et Christophe Cérino. *Lorient Ville Portuaire: Une nouvelle histoire des origines à nos jours*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2017: 15-24, 30-34, 38-9. Armel de Wismes. *La Vie quotidienne dans les ports bretons aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: Nantes, Brest, St. Malo, Lorient*. Paris: Hachette Littérature, 1973: 138-140. Michael Kwass. *Contraband: Louis Mandarin and the Making of a Global Underground.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2014: 15, 33, 64, 67.

an absolute monopoly on French trade to the East Indies.[12] However, Lorient's economy had suffered from NCDI's practice of bringing their own workers to Lorient rather than hiring people from the region. Through the celebration of Necker and the surrendering of feudal rights, Lorient's permanent committee and deputy were laying the groundwork for convincing Necker and the National Assembly to revoke the NCDI's trade privileges. Hopefully, this task could be accomplished without sacrificing the city's privileged status as the *port de retours*.

Lorient's residents and city officials sought to protect the city's privileged status even as they decried the NCDI's trade privilege as illegitimate. The city leaders' sense of responsibility towards the nation was premised on an expectation of the enjoyment of both privilege and liberty. I examine the minutes and correspondence of Lorient's municipal governments: the ad-hoc permanent committee in 1789 and the municipal council which replaced it in 1790 when the National Assembly created a new administrative structure for France. From September 1789 to May 1790, the municipal governments were largely occupied with fulfilling two main obligations: navigating the shortage of grain and paying a new national tax, the patriotic contribution. Using a trans-local approach to the grain crisis and the patriotic contribution in Lorient allows for a fine-grained analysis of the intersections between liberty and privilege in the early French Revolution.

In analyzing the fiscal and financial responsibilities of Lorient's municipal government, this study builds on earlier social and economic histories of the French Revolution. Historiographically, these modes of analysis flourished during the reign of Marxists interpretations of the Revolution.[13] After the revisionists overthrew strict notions of class

[12] Glenn J. Ames. *Colbert, Mercantilism, and the French Quest for Asian Trade*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996: 17-19, 57.
[13] See, for instance, the works of Alfred Soboul. Also: Alfred Cobban. *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

warfare, histories of political culture predominated.[14] The "linguistic turn" intensified this trend towards discursive analyses.[15] In this current, post-revisionist moment, social and economic histories are re-emerging.[16] New studies of the financial origins of the French Revolution have increasingly taken a more global approach.[17] Because Lorient's history is so entangled with that of French global commerce, this paper is able to bridge some of the literature between metropole and global studies.

More specifically, my work combines literature on privilege and fiscal reform, poor relief, and municipal governments during the early Revolution. Although taxation and poor relief both drained "often dilapidated finances" of municipal treasuries, the two have rarely been studied in conjunction with one another.[18] Instead of seeking to understand the financial origins of the Revolution,[19] I analyze the beginning moments when municipal officials had to decide what policies should be continued and which were no longer applicable. Furthermore, the few

[14] François Furet. *Penser la Révolution française*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1978. Keith Michael Baker. *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth-Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Lynn Hunt. *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
[15] Sophia Rosenfeld. *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. Marisa Linton. *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France*. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001. David A. Bell. *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003. Judith Surkis. "When was the Linguistic Turn? A Genealogy," *American Historical Review* 117:3 (2012): 700-722.
[16] Rebecca L. Spang, "Paradigms and Paranoia: How Modern Is the French Revolution?" *The American Historical Review* 108:1 (2003): 144. Rafe Blaufarb, *The Great Demarcation: The French Revolution and the Invention of Modern Property*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Charles Walton. "Capitalism's Alter Ego: The Birth of Reciprocity in Eighteenth-Century France," *Critical Historical Studies* (2018).
[17] C.A. Bayly. *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2004. Lynn Hunt. "The Global Financial Origins of 1789." In *The French Revolution in Global Perspective*. Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson, Eds. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013: 32-43. Paul Cheney. *Revolutionary Commerce: Globalization and the French Monarchy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.
[18] For taxation, I primarily draw on Michael Kwass. *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth-Century France: Liberté, Egalité, Fiscalité*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. For poor relief, Colin Jones. *Charity and* bienfaisance*: The Treatment of the Poor in the Montpellier Region, 1740-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. (quote at 166). Alan Forrest. *The French Revolution and the Poor*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981. Charles Tilly. "Food Supply and Public Order in Modern Europe," In *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. Charles Tilly, Ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975: 380-455.
[19] For instance, John Shovlin. *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.

studies that have acknowledged the patriotic contribution have often limited their discussion to a brief discursive analysis. In contrast, I follow its implementation from voluntary donations to the enforcement of national standards of collection. This combined approach for poor relief and taxation also provides greater insight into municipal governments' interactions with different levels of administration and new national regulations.[20] In taking these administrative interactions into account, Lorient's municipal governments' complicated attitudes towards privilege comes into stark relief.[21] In stressing Lorient's officials joint desires for continuity and change, I highlight their inconsistent attitudes towards the past.

Like the other members of the Breton Club, Delaville-Leroux prioritized abolishing privilege (private law). Private laws would be replaced by a national constitution and set of laws which applied equally to all citizens. John Markoff has analyzed how many French people saw their own privileges as legitimate property rather than as illegitimate.[22] Following August 4th, the National Assembly (and subsequent legislators) had to identify which privileges qualified as rights or property. Those legitimate privileges could not be confiscated without reimbursement. In some instances, privileges became universalized and turned into national law (such as the right not to be tortured but rather to be executed quickly via beheading). Making everyone subject to the same laws also meant that they could be subject to the same taxes. The destruction of privileges was therefore crucial for restoring the national treasury and preventing bankruptcy. The absolute destruction of privilege would, however, decimate Lorient's economy because it completely depended on its privileged status as the *port de retours.* Delaville-Leroux therefore

[20] In my analysis of the permanent committee and early Revolution, I refer to Lynn Hunt, *Revolution and Urban Politics in Provincial France: Troyes and Reims, 1786-1790.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978.
[21] Rafe Blaufarb. *The Politics of Fiscal Privilege in Provence, 1530s-1830s*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2012. John Markoff. *The Abolition of Feudalism: Peasants, Lords, and Legislators in the French Revolution*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.
[22] Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism*

had to balance the specific financial needs of his constituents with solving the national crisis.

Like most of Brittany, Lorient was run by a permanent committee throughout most of 1789.[23] While a widespread phenomenon, these committees were fundamentally the result of local political action. Lynn Hunt has shown that "they were not created by the national government, and they did not derive their legitimacy from being part of a national framework – except insofar as they symbolized the communes' participation in the national revolution."[24] In Lorient, the permanent committee did not destroy the preexisting municipal government, but it did render it irrelevant. As these permanent committees lacked any legal basis, their authority rested on popular support. In order to justify their power, committee members had to fulfill their responsibilities. In the fall of 1789, faced with unrest due to the uncertain future of the city's privilege and economy, Lorient's committee members prioritized responding to the grain crisis. There had been similar shortages of grain earlier in the century, but, as Judith Miller has shown, the 1789-1790 shortage was compounded by inexperienced administrators' mistakes such as the enforcement of free trade laws.[25] Furthermore, in 1789, Lorient's population was economically insecure, due to unprecedented levels of unemployment resulting from the NCDI's policies. As a result, the committee members had to take on the responsibility of helping the population fend off starvation. Otherwise, the city's inhabitants might view their authority as illegitimate, and political instability might ensue.

Lorient's permanent committee was heavily invested in portraying themselves and the city's population as ideal revolutionaries. They believed that this self-presentation would aid them as they competed with all of France for Necker's attention. In addition to calling for the

[23] Hunt, *Revolution and Urban Politics*, 134-136.
[24] Hunt, *Revolution and Urban Politics*, 142.
[25] Judith Miller, *Mastering the Market: The State and the Grain Trade in Northern France, 1700-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 93-128.

suppression of the NCDI in their *cahier de doléances* [notebook of grievances], Lorient's electors had chosen their deputy on the basis of his personal connections to Necker.[26] Like some of the members of Lorient's permanent committee, Delaville-Leroux was a merchant who had moved to the city to be more involved with the East Indies trade. Despite his prior relationship with Necker, Delaville-Leroux was unsuccessful in his attempts to get the popular finance minister to pay much attention to him or to Lorient's plight. A banker from Geneva, Necker had won admiration after publishing accounts of the state's spending. The French people widely viewed him as the epitome of virtue and the most trustworthy and capable individual to bring the state's finances onto firm ground.[27] To accomplish this immense task, he had to find a method of bringing more money into the state's coffers – preferably without raising taxes.[28]

In September 1789, the National Assembly began to call for voluntary donations to help the nation pay its bills. Necker argued that these donations would keep the state financially afloat. Within a month, legislators specified that these patriotic contributions were so vitally crucial that they needed to consist of roughly a quarter of an individual's yearly salary, although they could be paid over two or three years. Once the amounts due were recorded, the government would be able to spend the money before it was collected.[29] By January 1790, any pretense of these contributions being voluntary slipped away, and their official status as a tax was sanctioned by the king. After their celebration of Necker's return did not earn them any recognition, the committee hoped that their early patriotic contribution would provoke acknowledgement.

Lorient's permanent committee hoped to rely on voluntary donations to fulfill its

[26] AM Lorient 5Z122, 16; BB6, 40-41. Gérard Le Bouëdec. « Joseph Delaville-Leroux (1747-1803): entre négoce et politique, ou la carrière du premier parlementaire lorientais, » *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de L'Ouest*, 124: 2 (2017): 83-86.
[27] Marisa Linton, *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001): 198-208.
[28] Rebecca Spang. *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015: 67.
[29] Spang, *Stuff and Money*, 66.

financial responsibility to the city's residents and its fiscal responsibility to the National Assembly. This tactic proved successful with their new poor relief program. Although their method of obtaining enough grain for the city's population provoked enmity from their neighbors, the program flourished throughout the winter. Generous residents – and the NCDI – kept the city's treasury flooded with money. The patriotic contribution played out differently. Once it was transformed into a tax, the National Assembly expected every municipality to follow the same guidelines in assessing and collecting it. Lorient's municipal officials resisted. Citing the city's former tax-exempt status, they argued that the new regulations could not be implemented. While the National Assembly would ultimately uphold the city's privilege as *port de retours* as legitimate, they were not as lenient with fiscal privileges. Lorient's officials were ordered to conform. These two entangled responsibilities intersected with legal and enacted notions of liberty and privilege.

The Sun of Lorient

By taking a trans-local approach to studying Lorient's municipal government, I highlight its interactions with global commerce, the national government, and neighboring cities. Custom-built in 1666 for the CDI, Lorient's newness set it apart from other major colonial port cities. Bordeaux was "a most important ecclesiastical, judicial, and cultural center" to the extent that "the prestige of the city was not based on its trading position alone"[30] Other large port cities, such as Marseilles and Nantes, similarly served crucial functions outside of their trading connections.[31] In contrast, from its founding to the 1760s, Lorient was essentially a company town. Most of its residents were involved in one way or another, with the trade to the East Indies.

[30] Alan Forrest. *Society and Politics in Revolutionary Bordeaux*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975: 19.
[31] William Scott. *Terror and Repression in Revolutionary Marseilles*. New York: Macmillian, 1973: 1-21.

A large percentage Lorient's population had immigrated from other regions of France. These newcomers were drawn to Lorient because it was the gateway both to the Indian Ocean and to the United States, after the French involvement in the American War for Independence. During the eighteenth century, Lorient's population grew from about six thousand to roughly twenty-five thousand.[32]

In its early history, Lorient's sole *raison d'être* was to bolster French mercantilism. Its fate was intricately intertwined with that of the French East Indies Companies. The first CDI, established by Jean-Baptiste Colbert in 1664, was modeled after the British East Indies Company and the Dutch VOC. Colbert hoped that the CDI would increase France's wealth and prestige on the global stage.[33] However, the company routinely struggled to make a profit. In December 1703, they turned the land of Lorient back over to the king, and the city was incorporated into the kingdom.[34] For the next sixteen years, until the reorganization of the company, Lorient played only a small role in the company's endeavors. Then, in 1719, John Law, the future controller general of finances, merged the first CDI with the *Compagnie des Occidents*. This new company now held a monopoly of trade with both the West and East Indies. Law encouraged people to buy shares in the new company to fund the royal bank that he had established. Prices skyrocketed. They plummeted more rapidly. After this fiasco, the company was dismantled. In 1725, the crown granted a new company, the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* (CDIO) the privilege of trade with the East Indies and Asia. In the wake of France's crushing defeat at the hands of the British during the Seven Years War, the CDIO could no longer fund or maintain its

[32] Chaumeil, « Abrégé d'histoire de Lorient, » 69, 71. Catherine Guillevic. *L'Impact d'une ville nouvelle dans la Bretagne du XVIIIe siècle: Lorient & la Compagnie des Indes*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015: 18-19.
[33] Ames, *Colbert, Mercantilism*
[34] Guillevic, *L'impact d'une ville nouvelle*, 19.

outposts in the Indian Ocean. In 1769, the CDIO officially dissolved. Lorient's merchant community was worried that the city would be unable to sustain itself. However, its privilege as the *port de retours* was not rescinded. Much to its leaders' surprise, Lorient flourished during the period of free trade.[35]

Lorient's delayed integration into royal administration impacted its relationship with its neighbors. Due to the high levels of immigrants, Lorient's population mostly spoke French, while most of their neighbors spoke Breton. Governments of neighboring cities complained that Lorient had been imposed on the region. To prevent the wealth brought in from the colonies from staying centered in Lorient, individuals throughout the region regularly financed the Compagnie's voyages in return for a share of the profits.[36] Despite this benefit, municipal leaders and guild masters of neighboring cities argued that Lorient's prestige lured the youth away from their original community.[37] In the case of Hennebont, the district seat, these differences sparked a long-lasting rivalry, albeit one primarily perpetuated by Hennebont's city leaders. The main bone of contention seems to have been Lorient's tendency to hoard grain in times of shortages.[38] Lorient quickly became an economic center of the region, but its leaders were unable, even during the Revolution, to exert any kind of administrative authority over its neighbors.[39]

Throughout the eighteenth century, Lorient's merchants' colonial economic ties marked its municipal government's relationship with the national government. It gained several fiscal privileges. Louis XVI granted Lorient its own deputy to the Estates-General because of their

[35] Elizabeth Cross. "The French East India Company and the Politics of Commerce in the Revolutionary Era." PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2017.
[36] Guillevic, *L'impact d'une ville nouvelle*, 324-6.
[37] Guillevic, *L'impact d'une ville nouvelle*, 255-257, 264-270, 361-363.
[38] The history section of Hennebont's municipal website has a section titled "In the shadow of the sun of Lorient," which details the two cities' disagreements over hierarchy throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. « Hennebont, 2000 ans d'histoire(s) au fil du Blavet, » http://www.hennebont.bzh/decourvir-hennebont/2000-ans-dhistoire-et-de-patrimoine/hennebont-a-travers-les-siecles/
[39] Guillevic, *L'impact d'une ville nouvelle*, 333-365.

commercial ties.[40] Technically, the deputy would represent the entire *sénéchaussée* of Hennebont.[41] In the official notice, though, the King specified that the deputy chosen had to be "a merchant or shipowner from Lorient."[42] Some members of Lorient's municipal government (including Jean-Marie Esnoul des Chatelès, the city's mayor, Lapotaire, the assistant to the mayor who would later serve on the *Conseil des Anciens*, Le Mir and Barbarin, who would both later serve on the city's permanent committee, Blanche, a wigmaker, and Marais, a wool merchant) took this royal favor seriously. They reminded Delaville-Leroux upon his election that although he represented the whole *sénéchaussé*, they were the ones who had chosen him.[43] Delaville-Leroux's position as deputy was, in the eyes of his constituents, contingent on his ability to protect "the interests of our commerce."[44] This effectively meant the reestablishment of free trade.[45]

With the establishment of the *Nouvelle Compagnie des Indes* in 1785, the Parisian bankers who primarily ran it brought their own dockworkers to Lorient. The city still maintained the privilege of *port de retours*, so the NCDI had no choice but to dock its ships there. Unlike previous companies, however, its directors did not invest back into the city's economy. Not only were many dockworkers unemployed by the new policies, but other demographics suffered as well. Even merchants, who were not as negatively impacted, were dissatisfied by how little of the profits remained in Lorient. Paris seemed to be benefitting at the cost of Lorient.[46]

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[40] « Décision royale concernant la représentation aux États-Généraux de la Ville de Lorient, sénéchaussée d'Hennebont, 29 mars 1789 » In *Recueil de documents relatifs à la convocation des États-Généraux de 1789*. Volume 1, Tome 2. Armand Brette, Ed. Paris: 1894-1915: 269.
[41] A *sénéchaussée* was a judiciary, financial, and administrative district overseen by a royal officer (sénéchal) in charge of justice, roughly equivalent to a bailiff.
[42] « Décision royale concernant la représentation aux États-Généraux de la Ville de Lorient, » 269.
[43] AM Lorient BB6, 41.
[44] AM Lorient BB6, 41.
[45] Le Bouëdec, « Joseph Delaville-Leroux, » 83-86.
[46] Cross, "The French East Indies Company,"

Delaville-Leroux was not expected to achieve the feat of dismantling mercantilism on his own. Deputies from other port cities were also clamoring for the end of the NCDI because it was managed largely by Parisian shareholders. The port deputies criticized the shareholders for being unpatriotic. They portrayed the shareholders as being more intent on protecting their tax-exempt source of wealth than in the commercial health of France. Lorient and Delaville had therefore hoped that Necker, who, after all, wanted the state to have more sources of income, would be amenable to their request. Although the company did lose its privilege in April 1790, their belief in Necker was misguided. He quietly supported it and protected it from attacks during 1789.[47]

Delaville-Leroux kept Lorient continuously updated with news from the Breton Club and the National Assembly. The deputies of Brittany, known as the Breton Club, were important in several key moments in the early Revolution. The Breton Club, including Delaville-Leroux, instigated the Third Estates' refusal to complete roll call until the King authorized voting by head rather than by estate. This matter led to members of the Third Estate, along with some sympathetic clergy and liberal nobles, to form their own assembly and ultimately to swear an oath to never disband until they had given France a new constitution. The King eventually had to concede the point, and the Estates-General transformed into the National Assembly. The Breton Club also planned and initiated the giving up of privileges which resulted in the abolition of feudalism and privilege on August 4th. Delaville-Leroux explained to his constituents that, at the beginning of the evening session, the Breton deputies, starting with those from Rennes, "renounced their privileges."[48] With the abolition of private law, all provinces were now equal parts of the nation, and a national constitution could finally be written.[49]

[47] Cross, "The French East Indies Company,"
[48] AM Lorient BB14, 140.
[49] AM Lorient BB14, 140.

His enthused description glossed over some key issues. Breton deputies had forfeited the very privileges which had been key to the region's incorporation into France a few centuries back. Furthermore, Lorient's very existence as a city had been made possible through the granting of certain privileges. Its economy continued to rely on its privileged position as the *port de retours*. If all privileges were truly abolished, how was the city going to survive? After effusive praise for French liberty and patriotism, Delaville-Leroux addressed the elephant in the room. "I dare hope that all privileges […] have been abolished as a consequence of this deliberation, including the privilege of the *Compagnie des Indes* and all other companies of the same sort. The license of the port of Lorient will be destroyed as well."[50]

On August 12th, Lorient's permanent committee responded. After briefly acknowledging the benefits of the abolition of feudalism for all of France, they described local response. It was overwhelmingly negative. They reported that "a real schism between the members of the permanent committee and the municipality is forming."[51] To soften the blow of "this happy news," committee members had given a rousing speech to the city's residents about the incompatibility of privilege with patriotism.[52] The blow still fell hard. To further complicate matters, the committee had since been informed that the directors of the NCDI were seeking to obtain "the promptest suppression of the city's franchise" as *port de retours*.[53] We are now, they wrote, "in a difficult place."[54] Delaville-Leroux must *immediately* convince Necker to interfere. Surely, he would see that Lorient's privilege was "the same as the interest of the nation."[55]

[50] AM Lorient BB14, 141.
[51] AM Lorient BB14, 142.
[52] AM Lorient BB6, 27.
[53] AM Lorient BB14, 142.
[54] AM Lorient BB14, 142.
[55] AM Lorient BB14, 143.

Lorient's permanent committee's acceptance of the general sacrifice of privilege was in apparent contradiction with their ardent desire to maintain their own. In fact, this inconsistency was par for the course for many towns and regions through France.[56] Lorient's city officials hoped that they would be able to convince the Finance Minister and the National Assembly of their worth to the nation. Eventually, they would be successful. The city retained its position as *port de retours* throughout most of the Revolution, though it eventually shared the privilege with Toulon, near Marseille.[57] Until this position was secured, the permanent committee needed to quell the city's population's fear of the imminent destruction of what remained of their livelihoods.[58] Unsure of their position, the committee's members frantically sought to find means of maintaining the peace. In order to maintain control and provide political stability, the permanent committee had to balance its obligations to the city's population with its desire to impress Necker. Both of these goals required money. The former would be addressed primarily through a new poor relief program, and the latter through the committee's early obedience of new tax legislation.

Feeding the Poor

On December 2, 1789, the lower officers and gunners of a regiment of royal artillery colonial troops sent a message to Lorient's permanent committee. They reminded the committee that their annual saints festival celebrating Saint Barbara, the patron of artillerymen, was scheduled to be held in two days. This year's festival, however, would be markedly different. There would be no brioches. The officers wrote that they "believed it was their duty to replace

[56] Markoff, *Abolition of Feudalism*.
[57] Cross, "The French East Indies Company"
[58] AM Lorient BB6, 34.

the consumption of brioches with the greater necessity of distributing bread to the poor." The committee minutes recorded that the officers "came, as a result, to deposit the sum of 204 pounds [the normal cost of the regiments' annual brioches] into the *Caisse de Bienfaisance*." The committee expressed their "admiration and gratitude" for the regiment's thoughtfulness for "the poor and suffering humanity." The committee could not offer monetary recompense, lest they offend the officers' "generosity and heroism." They could, however, reward the donation with "all the publicity that they deserve." The committee therefore decreed that "an extract of this present deliberation shall be printed" and "distributed throughout the city." An additional copy "will be sent to the National Assembly this very day."[59]

Due to a combination of droughts and hailstorms, northern France had a particularly bad harvest in 1789. Judith Miller has shown how the relative inexperience of new administrators exacerbated the crisis, as they repeated mistakes from previous shortages.[60] The most notable instance was when the National Assembly reinstituted the free circulation of grain on August 29, 1789. This decree crippled regional or local administrators' attempts to secure grain for their population.[61] Local administrators often flouted this law. Some seized grain outright, while others reinstituted price controls.

In contrast, Lorient's permanent committee cooperated with this decree. They were wary of losing what support they had garnered in the National Assembly. Given that they were seeking the re-establishment of free trade with the East Indies, flagrantly flouting free trade laws at home would not have looked well. Furthermore, because of the city's wealth (diminished though it was), the committee members believed that they could obtain sufficient provisions for the city's

[59] All quotes in this paragraph from AM Lorient BB9, 95.
[60] Miller, *Mastering the Market*, 93-128.
[61] Miller, *Mastering the Market*, 125-133.

needy by preserving free trade. In order to capitalize on the situation, the committee created a *Caisse de Bienfaisance* in September 1789.[62] They called on the city's wealthy residents to donate to this "Philanthropy Fund" and used the money to set up a poor relief program in order to shore up their own legitimacy and authority. While they were able to maintain political stability on a municipal level, the neighboring cities' residents and governments complained that Lorient's officials were undermining their stability through buying up all of their grain.

The permanent committee presented these donations as voluntary yet vitally necessary. Because so many dockworkers were unemployed due to the NCDI's policies, the committee explicitly expected its officials and merchants to fix the problem. They wrote: "In order to enable the city to be in a state to carry out its intentions, the administrators of the *Compagnie des Indes* and the merchants, traders of Indian goods, are requested to donate to the fund."[63] They did not initially respond. In the meantime, other individuals tried to pick up the slack. On October 5, the committee learned that a "letter had circulated" among the city's militias "carrying an invitation to flood the *Caisse de Bienfaisance*" with donations "to relieve poverty."[64] Donations only trickled in until women's actions in Paris and Versailles sparked fears of the dangers that a starving populace posed to political stability.

Meanwhile in Paris, the situation had reached a breaking point. "On the morning of October 5 [1789], upset by the recent events in Versailles and tired of standing in bread lines, several hundred Parisian women began mobilizing."[65] "The legion of women" marched on Versailles.[66] Significantly, they were accompanied by parts of the National Guard, including the

[62] AM Lorient BB9, 10.
[63] AM Lorient, BB9, 10.
[64] AM Lorient, BB9, 24.
[65] Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror*, 66.
[66] AM Lorient BB16, 66,

Marquis de La Fayette. Lorient's committee heard of this momentous event within the week due to Delaville-Leroux's diligence. Trying desperately to capture the tense atmosphere, the fear of violence, and its impacts on the National Assembly, he included as many details as possible in his letters to his constituents.[67] He described how "the women's deputies entered the house of the king, who received them with goodwill and promised them to give new orders as to Paris's sustenance."[68] Then, they "demanded entrance" into the National Assembly "to express their grievances."[69] As the women "murmured in the gallery," the Assembly discussed how defuse the situation. They decided to bring grain to Paris at all costs.[70] Delaville-Leroux explained that because of these women's insistence on confronting the King and demands for regulation of grain prices, the King and the National Assembly would be moving to Paris.[71]

Replying to Delaville-Leroux's letter recounting the events of the October Days, the committee reported that "it will be very difficult to supply the cities of Brittany with enough grain."[72] "The situation is more distressing than we feared," they continued, as now some individuals might feel justified in concluding "that only the use of violence and force will overcome the obstinate dread" of starvation.[73] After anxiously worrying about the people's reactions, they then thanked him for providing so many details as it allowed them "to forecast a total catastrophe, which would undoubtedly have been the effect if not for your characteristic prudence."[74] Their concern with the plight of the city's impoverished population began to take on a more urgent note.

[67] AM Lorient BB16, 62-71.
[68] AM Lorient BB16, 67.
[69] AM Lorient BB16, 67.
[70] AM Lorient BB16, 67.
[71] AM Lorient BB16, 68-72.
[72] AM Lorient BB16, 58.
[73] AM Lorient BB16, 58.
[74] AM Lorient BB16, 65.

After replying to Delaville-Leroux, Lorient's permanent committee beseeched their fellow citizens once again for help.[75] They also established a committee of subsistence.[76] Within the week of the establishment of the committee of subsistence, it received a windfall. In "an act of generosity and patriotism," Paul-Jacques-Augustin Périer gave "40,000 pounds to be used for purchasing grain."[77] Périer was a Colonel of the national dragoons and a founding director of the NCDI. He was one of only two company directors to reside in Lorient. In May 1789, the Parisian directors blamed Périer for not having prevented Lorient's deputy and municipal government from being so openly antagonistic towards the company. When the Parisian administrators learned from Lorient's permanent committee's call for charitable donations, they ordered Périer to volunteer the extraordinary sum of 40,000 pounds for poor relief.[78] They hoped that using company funds to underwrite the city's poor relief program would prove to the permanent committee that the NCDI had the city's best interests at heart.

The permanent committee accepted the money, but they did not record Périer's status or the origin of the money in their minutes. Ledoux's spontaneous donation of a portrait in August had elicited pages of effusive praise. In contrast, the committee brusquely ignored the NCDI directors' calculated gesture of friendship. Even though the committee had explicitly and repeated asked the NCDI to donate to the *Caisse de Bienfaisance*, when the company did so, through Périer, the committee did not publicize their support. The money Périer had offered, from their point of view, rightfully belonged to the city. After all, had the NCDI not funneled the majority of the profits to Paris or replaced the city's dockworkers with their own employees, then

[75] AM Lorient BB9, 36.
[76] This had been one of the first committees formed after the Estates-General's transformation into the National Assembly.
[77] AM Lorient BB9, 37-38.
[78] J. Conan. *La dernière Compagnie française des Indes (1785-1875): Avec la liste des principaux actionnaires de cette Compagnie*. Paris: Libraire des sciences politiques et Sociales, Marcel Riviére, 1942: 44.

the permanent committee would not be in the situation of having to provide for the city's population. The committee did not even bother to mention the exchange to Delaville-Leroux. Nor did they alter his instructions regarding the NCDI. Additional donations began to flow in to the *Caisse de Bienfaisance*. Botenau, one of Lorient's bakers "offered to give two barrels of grain up to the commune."[79] Other individuals donated anonymously. None of the donations even touched the level of Périer and the NCDI's contribution. Yet all the other donors were thanked profusely.

Now that the project was sufficiently funded, the subsistence committee needed to transmute silver into bread. Two days after Périer's grandiose gesture of generosity, an anonymous presenter to the committee argued that because of the actions of the neighboring cities' governments, "the circulation of grain is not as free as it should be."[80] The committee must take action to bring grain to free markets. Coincidentally, the only true free markets in the region were in Lorient. Enforcing the law of free circulation of grain would therefore also fill the stomachs of the city's residents. In response, the committee ramped up their policy of using the city's militias to bring hoarded grain to market. Fearful of accusations of confiscation, they transported the grain to markets across the region.

Lorient's subsistence committee faced the Herculean task of being effective within the constraints of the mandate of free trade. Lorient's committee used the vocabulary and logic of 'free' trade to create an effective monopsony. Using the donated money, they began to buy grain for the city. To acquire enough grain, they had to send representatives to neighboring cities, such as Sarzeau and Hennebont, to purchase grain from their markets.[81] Because of the *Caisse de*

[79] AM Lorient BB9, 50.
[80] AM Lorient BB9, 39.
[81] AM Lorient BB9, 49.

Bienfaisance and the city's reputation for wealth, these representatives were able to consistently outbid merchants from other cities. Lorient's city leaders had hoarded grain earlier in the century. Consequently, this new method of buying up from neighboring cities' grains prompted pushback and criticism by those cities' governments. Bakers from Hennebont sent several letters to Lorient's permanent committee denouncing their practice of having individuals buy grain on behalf of the city. Citing Lorient's previous military actions to maintain the free circulation of grain, Hennebont's city government questioned the apparent "malicious intentions" of their "fellow patriots and brothers."[82]

In their confrontation, bakers from Lorient and Hennebont disagreed over the meaning of liberty. In their myriad petitions, Hennebont's bakers argued that it was manifestly unfair for representatives of Lorient to use communal money to purchase grain. They believed that using communal funds, such as the *Caisse de Bienfaisance*, qualified as a form of confiscation. No individual merchant could match Lorient's wealth. Backed by their city's permanent committee, Hennebont's bakers argued that Lorient's committee was manipulating the circulation of grain by using the city's militias to force it to come to market. Through the combination of the city's military and economic might, the directors of Lorient's poor relief program were ensuring that neighboring cities would be unable to buy enough grain to feed their citizens. Under the national mandate of free trade, Hennebont's bakers and residents did not have a chance to ensure that they could obtain enough grain for themselves. They thought very little of having the liberty to starve.

In its response to the petitions from Hennebont, Lorient's permanent committee defended their citizens' right to buy as much grain as they could afford, regardless of the money's source.

[82] AM Lorient BB9, 49.

Lorient's city leaders believed that they would profit from free trade both on a local level (purchasing enough grain) and on a global scale (bringing in Indian and colonial goods). In both instances, their attempts to have free trade legally enforced was based on the premise of believing that their wealth would ensure their benefits. In both instances, residents and governments of neighboring cities criticized Lorient's residents for hoarding its wealth rather than enriching the region (accusations that Lorient's government hurled at the Parisian directors of the NCDI).

Throughout most of October and November of 1789, Lorient's committee of subsistence focused on obtaining as much grain as possible. On November 30, they estimated that the first distribution would cost approximately 7,171 *livres*, 10 *sols*, and 6 *deniers* in grain alone.[83] They did not record, however, how much grain this sum was able to purchase. Hunt tracked the prices of grain in Troyes and Reims. From October-November 1789, the price of raw wheat per pound was approximately 6 pounds.[84] If the price was similar in Lorient, this expenditure would have purchased approximately 1200 pounds of grain.

Despite their accumulation of grain, the subsistence committee had not yet decided how they were going to distribute charity to the city's poor. In November, Monsieur Ténaud, a merchant associated with the Compagnie des Indes, gave a series of speeches on the "bureau of unfortunates" to the permanent committee on behalf of the police bureau.[85] He starkly outlined the need to determine the worthiness of impoverished citizens. In keeping with *Ancien Règime* restrictions on charity, Ténaud argued that the committee had to ensure that the city's charity

[83] AM Lorient BB9, 91.
[84] Hunt, *Revolution and Urban Politics*, 42-43.
[85] AM Lorient BB9, 86. In August 1789, residents from other cities praised Lorient's police for maintaining order in the city. BB6, 22. The next month, the permanent committee had reorganized the police bureau. BB9, 19-21.

would not include people without "good morals."[86] In order to enforce the prerequisite of upstanding morality, the committee would have to examine the background of all individuals seeking charity. Ténaud suggested excluding prostitutes, beggars, individuals with no history of legitimate employment, and people who could not explain why they were in Lorient.[87] In his report, Ténaud implied that individuals who had become unemployed due to the *Nouvelle Compagnie des Indes*' policies had legitimate reasons to expect the city's government to take care of them. The NCDI was still not abolished, and the city's privileged position was still threatened. Unemployed workers had every right to be concerned about their ability to provide for their family – and every right to accuse the permanent committee of not providing for them.

Temporarily abandoning their pretense of unconstrained generosity, the permanent committee acknowledged the rationality of the police bureau's arguments.[88] They passed new decrees regulating the poor relief program. Each district was required to create their own commission of subsistence. These new commissions would be overseen both by the districts' presidents and the permanent committee's own subsistence committee. To ensure conformity with the new regulations, the permanent committee "unanimously named M. Ténaud to be one of the Commissaires presiding over the Bureau of Charity."[89] Under his oversight, each of these commissions would compile a list of people in their neighborhoods who were seeking charity. They had to record "the state of these persons, their reasons for claiming the assistance of the commune, the number of their home and the name of the street, the age of these persons, the number and age of their children, the motive of their need, and finally the number of pounds of

[86] AM Lorient BB9, 86. Colin Jones. *Charity and* bienfaisance: *The Treatment of the Poor in the Montpellier Region, 1740-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982: 46-50, 87, 166-167.
[87] Given that Lorient's population had increased by 8,000 from 1770 to 1789 alone, this restriction on eligibility raises the question of how many residents would have been excluded from this poor relief program.
[88] AM Lorient BB9, 91.
[89] AM Lorient, BB9, 99.

bread they judged necessary to be accorded to them each week."[90] The district presidents and the city's subsistence committee would review these registers. Finally, all of the information would be doublechecked by the police bureau. Only after all this demographical information was collected and verified would the city begin distributed tickets for bread.[91] The district commissions would personalize each ticket to the individual recipient. Then, the bakers would mark the free loaves of bread with the initials of the bureau of charity, so as to discourage theft.[92]

After the first week of distribution, Ténaud reported back to the permanent committee on behalf of the Charity Bureau that the number of recipients was undoubtedly going to increase a lot throughout the winter. He argued that Lorient must shoulder its responsibility regardless of the cost, for "to refuse succor to those who ask for it and who have true needs, that is, without doubt, something which our humanity and charity would never be able to permit."[93] Each subsequent week brought an increase in the number of families seeking aid.[94] Lorient's municipal government could not neglect their responsibility to the city's poor without running the risk of local food riots. But the city officials' responsibilities were not limited to poor relief. At the same time that Lorient's city leaders were trying to prevent local unrest through the establishment of a poor relief program, they were also obligated to fulfill their fiscal responsibilities to the new national government.

[90] AM Lorient BB9, 92-93.
[91] These tickets [*billets*] and lists are not in Lorient's digitized municipal archives. However, Jones argues that receiving charity was seen to be so shameful that governments regularly intentionally destroyed their charity records to prevent individuals from gaining access to this information. Jones, *Charity and* bienfaisance, 95-96. However, Gaston Blandin has shown that Nantes preserved its lists of recipients of public assistance during the revolution. Gaston Blandin. *Pain du pauvre à Nantes, 1789-1799: de la charité à l'assistance publique ou la Révolution face à la pauvreté*. Nantes: Université Inter-Ages de Nantes, 1992.
[92] AM Lorient BB9, 93-99.
[93] AM Lorient BB9, 115-116.
[94] AM Lorient BB9, 180.

Patriotic Contributions

Burdened with the nation's crushing debt but prohibited from declaring bankruptcy and refusing to raise taxes until the ratification of a constitution, the National Assembly asked the French people to send patriotic contributions to help them cover the nation's debt. This was not one of the Assembly's more radical actions, as this method of raising funds without technically taxing the people was hardly new.[95] In one sense, just as the guillotine universalized a privilege previously limited to the nobility (the right to be executed by beheading), the transformation of impositions into contributions nominally extended the fiscal privilege to decide one's tax amount from the clergy to the whole of France. Yet, as Michael Kwass has convincingly shown, the clergy had not exactly been at full liberty to determine the amount of their "free gifts" to the king.[96] Likewise, the size of individual patriotic contributions would be legislated by the National Assembly. Individuals making over 400 pounds a year were required to donate 25% of their yearly income.[97]

Although this rhetoric of gifts in lieu of – or in addition to – taxes had an illustrious history,[98] the advent of the Revolution seems to have marked an increase in the state's call for voluntary donations and contributions. Lynn Hunt posits that "*impôts* [impositions] were replaced with contributions, which sounded more voluntary."[99] On a rather prosaic note, the

[95] Alain Guery. "Le roi dépensier: Le don, la contrainte, et l'origine du système financier de la monarchie française d'Ancien Règime. » *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 39: 6 (1984): 1256. Rafe Blaufarb. *The Politics of Fiscal Privilege in Provence, 1530s-1830s*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2012: 39. Michael Kwass. *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth-Century France: Liberté, Egalité, Fiscalité*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: 95-103, 110-111. Fiscally privileged groups, including the region of Brittany, were often pressured into repeating their donations to the crown under the threat of the revocation of their exemptions. Robert A. Schneider. *Public Life in Toulouse, 1463-1789: From Municipal Republic to Cosmopolitan City*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989: 278-284.
[96] Kwass. *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation*, 110-111.
[97] AM Lorient BB9, 25. *Instruction publiée par ordre du Roi, relativement à la contribution patriotique*. Aix: Impr. Ordinaires du Roi & du Pays, 1789.
[98] Bell, *The Cult of the Nation*, 89, 99.
[99] Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, 20.

voluntary rhetoric reflects the Assembly's lack of authority to inflict more taxes on the nation. The Assembly had begun by declaring all existing taxes to be illegal because they had been instituted without the nation's consent. Yet the government desperately needed more sources of income, not fewer. The patriotic contribution was therefore initially presented as a stop-gap measure to keep the government afloat while the Assembly drafted France's constitution.[100] Simultaneously voluntary and mandatory, the tax provided difficult to collect.

Lorient's permanent committee hoped that their early contribution would elicit praise and support from the National Assembly and Necker.[101] Lorient's city leaders' sense of responsibility towards the nation was premised on an expectation of the enjoyment of both privilege and liberty. As Lorient's committee wrote to Delaville-Leroux, the city's residents "will give, with pleasure, the last *centime* [penny] of their fortune to the national treasury, but if the A*ncien Régime* continues to survive, this patriotic generosity will freeze over."[102]

In August 1789, Lorient's committee wrote to Delaville-Leroux that he must immediately obtain "liberty of commerce with the East Indies" and "the destruction of the cruel, tax-exempt franchise," more commonly known as the NCDI.[103] They chastised Delaville-Leroux for not completing his task quickly enough. If privileges had already been eradicated, they argued, then there ought to be no obstacle in abolishing an entity created and sustained solely through privilege.

Openly irritated, Delaville-Leroux explained that he was in a bit of a bind. Other deputies were accusing him of contradiction because he was trying to ensure that Lorient's privilege as

[100] Spang, *Stuff and Money*, 61-69.
[101] Le Bouëdec, « Joseph Delaville-Leroux, » 90.
[102] AM Lorient BB16, 46.
[103] AM Lorient BB16, 51.

the *port de retours* for the East Indies would be preserved even after the NCDI was abolished.[104] The committee would do well to remember that the city was likewise shot through with privilege. This contradictory stance towards privileges was not unusual. Rather, it characterized the arduous process of separating out illegitimate privileges from legitimate properties and rights.[105] Like other communities across France, Lorient's officials sought to convince the national government that their privileges were legitimate and beneficial to the nation. Nevertheless, these accusations were clearly a source of unease for Delaville-Leroux.

His position, Delaville-Leroux continually reminded his constituents, was hardly being helped by the committee's failure to prove the city's worth to the state. Lorient's initial patriotic contribution, which totaled roughly three times Necker's personal donation to the National Assembly, was deemed insufficient. Delaville-Leroux wrote to the permanent committee that as Lorient was known to be "one of the richest cities in the kingdom," their patriotic contribution showed that "without a doubt, the poorest are the most generous."[106] "If Lorient wanted to benefit from free commerce with the Indies," he continued, then their "patriotic gifts would have to be much larger."[107]

Throughout France, the government faced extreme difficulty in collecting the new tax. When Necker first suggested the patriotic contribution, he simply asked citizens to truthfully report their income. Citing the innate honesty of the French people, he argued that it was unnecessary for the state to use force, as relying on voluntary declarations and contributions would easily fill the treasury.[108] Early model forms intended to help individuals calculate the size

[104] AM Lorient BB16, 52. Several cities had requested that Lorient's privilege be revoked in their *cahiers de doléances.* Archives parlementaires [AP] Tome 2, 401, 541; Tome 3, 700; Tome 5, 384; Tome 6, 109, 117.
[105] Markoff, *Abolition of Fedualism.*
[106] AM Lorient BB16, 55, 61.
[107] AM Lorient BB16, 61.
[108] Roger Broullard. *Des Impositions extraordinaires sur le revenu pendant la Révolution (Contribution patriotique) et de leur application dans la commune de Bordeaux.* Bordeaux: Cadoret, imprimeur de l'université, 1910: 9-10.

of their contributions encouraged individuals to give a contribution which exceeded the minimum.[109] In early October 1789, Paul-Jacques-Augustin Périer, one of the NCDI's directors, came to Lorient's city hall to make his patriotic contribution. He gave 20,000 pounds. Several committee members knew for a fact that "this sum greatly exceeded a quarter of his revenue."[110] The committee was therefore astonished by his devotion to the state. Whereas they would not acknowledge the magnanimous donation he would make on behalf of the NCDI to the *Caisse de Bienfaissance* later that week, they "ardently applauded" his remarkable contribution to the national treasury.[111] However praised it was, Périer's generous contribution did not inspire emulation. It is the only example in Lorient's municipal archives where an individual gave more than the expected amount.

As voluntary contributions did not refill the treasury, the National Assembly changed tactics and ordered municipal governments to compile registers of declarations of their residents' tax obligations. They also distributed forms for "people who have already made a gift to the National Assembly" and who now "wanted it to count towards their patriotic contribution."[112] At a time when the national treasury needed as much cash as possible, this resistance against paying taxes shows how the French people did not simply accept the burden of new responsibilities. The National Assembly had to be careful not to test the limits of the nation's generosity.

The difficulty in collecting taxes was compounded by the National Assembly's inconsistency about who ought to be determining the declarations of how much each individual owed. The Assembly's initial decision that municipal governments should collect declarations produced mixed results. In an attempt to expedite the process of tax collection, the National

[109] Hôtel-de-Ville de Paris. *Contribution Patriotique*. Paris, [n.d.]: 9.
[110] AM Lorient BB9, 29.
[111] AM Lorient BB9, 29, 37-38.
[112] *Instruction publiée par ordre du Roi*, 11.

Assembly decreed that the officials who had the most experience in collecting *capitations* should be placed in charge of the patriotic contribution. The *capitation* resembled the patriotic contribution in several ways. They were both assessed and collected on an individual basis.[113] Furthermore, the *capitation* had been intended to be a universal tax. In 1789, it was the tax with the least number of exceptions.[114] The Assembly hoped that keeping the same administrators would smooth the process of checking the new tax rolls against receipts of previous taxes.[115] However, this decree could not be implemented in Lorient. Residents of the city had not been obligated to pay the capitation for roughly sixty years.[116] Its government therefore lacked both the tax rolls and the tax officials which would have been the most helpful in establishing the size of individuals' patriotic contributions.

As a result, Lorient's permanent committee was initially at somewhat of a loss as to how to figure out how much each person should pay. In early November 1789, Monsieur Le Corvaisier fils, whose father owned the main supply ships for the navy and colonies, announced to the committee that the official method of self-declaration was simply not working.[117] The committee expressed their appreciation of his forthright honesty. When they returned to the issue of how "to more precisely collect patriotic gifts," they decided to create a new office within the treasury to oversee the declarations.[118] The committee "unanimously nominated" Le Corvaisier fils because they knew that "his patriotic zeal and his well-known love for the public good would

[113] Nathalie Ostroot and Wayne Snyder. "The 'Capitation': Taxing Commoners and Nobles during the Old Regime." *Journal of European Economic History* 31:2 (2002): 367-390.
[114] Mireille Touzery. « La dernière taille. Abolition des privilèges et technique fiscale d'après le rôle de Janvry pour les derniers mois de 1789 et pour 1790. » *Histoire & Mesure* 12:1/2 (1997): 93-142.
[115] Broullard, *Des Impositions extraordinaires*, 17.
[116] Gérard Le Bouëdec. « Préface, » In *L'impact d'une ville nouvelle dans la Bretagne du XVIIIe siècle: Lorient & la Compagnie des Indes*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015: 23.
[117] AM Lorient BB9, 63.
[118] AM Lorient BB9, 75.

not allow him to refuse."[119] Upon his appointment, Le Corvaisier fils denounced previous administrators for being too lenient. He criticized their apparent reluctance to prioritize the well-being of the state. To show his self-sacrificial devotion to the state, Le Corvaisier fils voluntarily paid what his assessed amount should have been.[120] The nation was now richer by five pounds. His dedication to the public good would not go unrewarded. After his election to office following the reorganization of municipal government, the new city council reimbursed him eighty pounds for his service to the state.[121]

In January 1790, the National Assembly instituted oversight of the municipal officials. They required that "the registers of declarations created by the municipalities" would be approved by three layers of bureaus and commissioners, including the district capital's municipal officers.[122] Later, the district and departmental administrators would also review the declarations.[123] Understanding the collection of the patriotic contribution therefore requires a brief overview of new administrative standardization of France. Unlike the previous provinces (such as Brittany), the new departments (like Morbihan) all shared the same laws and administrative structures. In Morbihan, Vannes, which held the local bishopric and had been administratively important under the *Ancien Règime,* became the seat of the department.[124] Its city leaders, particularly the bishops and ecclesiastical authorities, had never really approved of the establishment of Lorient. In their *cahier de doléances*, members of Vannes's First and Third Estates called for the suppression of Lorient's privilege as *port de retours*.[125] Rather than move

[119] AM Lorient BB9, 75.
[120] AM Lorient BB9, 129-130.
[121] AM Lorient 1D1.
[122] Broullard, *Des Impositions extraordinaires*, 17.
[123] Broullard, *Des Impositions extraordinaires*, 22, 27.
[124] Guillevic, *L'impact d'une ville nouvelle,* 365-367.
[125] AP Tome 6: 109, 117

the administrative fonctionnaires to the new city of Lorient, the National Assembly chose to maintain the intercity power relationships in the region.

With that ambition thus thwarted, Lorient's city leaders hoped that the city could at least become the district seat. In December 1789, the National Assembly ordered an assembly to be held in Vannes to pick the seats of the newly-created districts.[126] Two weeks later, Lorient's permanent committee sent two letters to Paris. The first ordered Delaville-Leroux to insist that Lorient become the district seat; the second announced to all Breton deputies that the Vannes assembly had chosen Lorient.[127] Hennebont city government denounced the latter as an outright lie.[128] The cities' rivalry became an issue of national concern. In January 1790, the National Assembly's Constitutional Committee ordered Morbihan administrations to "choose once and for all whether the city of Hennebont or Lorient should be capital of their district."[129] Once the departmental administrators discovered the deception of Lorient's permanent committee, they chose Hennebont.[130] Because of the fallout over choosing the district capital, neither the district nor departmental administrators were willing to give Lorient's municipal officials any leeway. Instead, they treated their requests and complaints with a high degree of skepticism.

While the district and department administrations were being formed, municipal governments were also being standardized. In January 1790, Lorient's permanent committee oversaw elections to the new municipal council.[131] Two months later, the council finally addressed the matter of the city's patriotic contributions. Although the payment was due, they noted that, to their "greatest embarrassment," it seemed as though "the large majority of

[126] AP Tome 10: 698.
[127] AM Lorient BB9, 122-124.
[128] AM Lorient BB9, 127.
[129] AP Tome 11: 395.
[130] Guillevic, *L'impact d'une nouvelle ville*, 362-363.
[131] AM Lorient 1K1,1K2.

contributors were no longer at liberty to pay" their patriotic contributions.[132] Balancing both "the needs of the state and the actual circumstances presented an absolute impossibility" to most of the city's residents.[133]

On March 17th, the council wrote to Necker reminding him of the city's previous contribution. Unfortunately, "some difficulties" were hindering the collection of the next payment.[134] However, they should be able to raise the money from lenders and then reimburse them. It would just take some time. The council members in attendance on March 31, 1790 offered their signatures as a guarantee that the city's contribution would be paid within a month. Jean-Jacques Le Cointe, the mayor of Lorient who had previously served on the Superior Council of the Iles de France and de Bourbon, Philippe-Joseph Bondeville, a former judge of Lorient and a NCDI syndic, Ténaud, a NCDI merchant and the head of the Bureau of Subsistence, Le Corvaisier fils, the administrator in charge of the patriotic contribution, LeBeau, a merchant and navy officer, Trentinian, Galabert, La Vigne Buisson, and Mancel all signed.[135] These nine individuals had now taken on the city's tax burden as personal debt. If the city's residents did not pay their full contributions, then these council members would have to make up the difference.

On April 4th, the council recorded that departmental administrators had asked Lorient's municipal government "to send, as soon as possible, the register of declarations for the patriotic contribution to Vannes."[136] The council tried to explain that the task at hand was not so simple. In fact, it was "an impossibility to give Vannes what they were asking for."[137] They wrote to the

[132] AM Lorient 1D1.
[133] AM Lorient 1D1.
[134] AM Lorient 2D23, 4-5.
[135] AM Lorient 1D1.
[136] AM Lorient 1D1.
[137] AM Lorient 1D1.

departmental officials to say that they could send in a copy of the city's declarations, as long as the department recognized that they were far from complete.[138] "The collection of this contribution is going extremely slowly," they explained, because of all the required paperwork.[139] They further argued that Lorient was too much of an exception for any of this paperwork to be useful. Not only did they lack the tax rolls and officials, but they had so many newcomers that doublechecking individuals took an inordinate amount of time. It was therefore decidedly unreasonable to give them the same deadline as ordinary cities.

The council sent a letter to Delaville-Leroux reminding him that they had already explained this situation to Necker. The National Assembly therefore ought to have already been informed that it was "absolutely impossible" for the city to send in its patriotic contribution by the deadline.[140] Bemoaning the fact that Necker always "responds with silence," the council asked for more time. The payment would undoubtedly be more satisfactory, the council maintained, if the city's residents were ensured of future income *before* being expected "to come to the rescue of the state."[141]

On April 5th, Delaville elatedly wrote to his constituents that all their worries were lifted. "The National Assembly has decided that the commerce with the Indies beyond the Cap of Good Hope will be free for all the French."[142] The NCDI would continue to exist, but it no longer held a monopoly on trade with the East Indies. Furthermore, he rejoiced, they have confirmed that Lorient will continue to be the exclusive *port de retours*. With this spectacular news delivered, Delaville-Leroux dryly commented that it now seemed that there was no reason for Lorient to

[138] AM Lorient 2D23, 11.
[139] AM Lorient 2D23, 13.
[140] AM Lorient BB16, 203.
[141] AM Lorient BB16, 203.
[142] AM Lorient BB16, 209.

continue "to refuse the royal treasury."[143] The nation had done its part. Now Lorient had to fulfill its responsibilities. Lorient's council agreed.[144] And yet they did no such thing.

On April 30th, the council received letters patent from the King ordering the municipality to obey the National Assembly's decrees "concerning the payment of the patriotic contribution."[145] That day, the council sent a frantic letter to the departmental administrators in Vannes asking for help collecting the contribution.[146] But it was too late. The nine councilmembers were now in debt to the state.

On May 2nd, the council sent various bills and letters of exchange to the tune of 36,991 *livres* 12 *sols* 1 *denier* as the city's patriotic contribution.[147] This came to approximately one tenth the size of their original donation and not even double what Périer himself had given. Officially the council cited the immense difficulty in creating the registers of declarations in the absence of *capitation* rolls. In their correspondence, they bitterly complained that the National Assembly's tax decrees "have no foundation in justice."[148] They were astonished that despite their prioritization of the public good above their private interests, there was apparently no way to reclaim their money. Delaville-Leroux was decidedly unsympathetic. He wrote scathingly that the city officials were ungrateful and obviously unconcerned with the impression they were making.[149]

Although Lorient's city leaders attained their stated goal of continued privilege and reestablished liberty, they did not fulfill the city's fiscal obligations to the state. The willingness of councilmembers to take on the financial risk suggests that they might have had the nation's

[143] AM Lorient BB16, 213.
[144] AM Lorient BB16, 213.
[145] AM Lorient 1D1.
[146] AM Lorient 2D23, 22.
[147] AM Lorient 1D1.
[148] AM Lorient 2D23, 22.
[149] AM Lorient BB16, 236.

best interests at heart. However, their methods were stuck in a privileged past. When the councilmembers invoked the city's previous fiscal privileges as justification for their inability to collect taxes, superior administrators refused to grant them any leniency. Lorient's privileged past was all the more reason for them to be expected to promptly and completely fulfill their responsibilities to the nation. Their inability to recognize this illustrates the fundamental incompatibility of liberty and privilege.

Conclusion

In the first year of the French Revolution, Lorient's city officials sought to balance the well-being of the nation with the interests of the city's residents (including themselves). They hoped that they would be able to financially regenerate both the city and the nation through an optimal combination of privilege and liberty. As the permanent committee put it in August 1789, the private interest of the city was "the same as the interest of the nation."[150] Ultimately, they did obtain the abolition of the NCDI's trade privileges while maintaining the city's privilege of being the only port of legal entry for ships returning from the East Indies. However, this was not achieved until April 1790. In the meantime, the city officials had to deal with their economic responsibilities to their residents and their fiscal obligations to the nation. The way that they responded to these duties allows us to understand their views on liberty and privilege.

In establishing a poor relief program aimed at helping the city's unemployed residents, the permanent committee relied on the financial resources of the NCDI. However, they did not publicly acknowledge the company's aid for the impoverished. Instead, their actions constantly upheld the new national mandate of free trade. Thanks to the NCDI's donation, the committee

[150] AM Lorient BB14, 143.

was able to praise liberty of commerce while procuring enough grain for the city. Less wealthy cities were unable to do both at the same time. While the law of free trade was the same for all French people, the differences in their economic resources drastically altered the meaning of liberty. For Lorient's residents, it meant the liberty to eat; for those of Hennebont, it meant the liberty to starve. In justifying their interpretation of liberty, Lorient's committee denied the privileged origins of their ability to enjoy the fruits of free trade.

In the case of the patriotic contribution, Lorient's municipal governments' paradoxical views towards liberty and privilege formed the crux of the matter. They contributed on the basis that their demands be met. Despite the voluntary rhetoric, however, the patriotic contribution was a tax. The National Assembly and, later, the departmental administrators fully expected Lorient's city officials to abandon the city's fiscally privileged past and to conform to the new regulations like every other municipality in France. But Lorient's councilmembers resisted. Continually citing the city's previous enjoyment of private laws, they argued that it was impossible for them to suddenly obey the new uniform national tax laws. The transition from a privileged past to a national present could not be made overnight, they argued. Nor, apparently, could it be made in a year. Even after the city's wishes were fulfilled, the councilmembers were still unwilling to acknowledge that their fiscal privileges were fundamentally incompatible with national law.

Through this trans-local analysis, we see how the push and pull relationship between privileges and liberty was worked out. This struggle played out not just within the municipality, but in the city officials' interactions with neighboring cities, departmental, district, and national administrations. Old relationships shaped possible responses to the new situation. Lorient's officials did not want to relinquish their privileged past, and they were unable to escape the consequences of their interactions with other cities' governments. The grappling between

privilege and liberty thus sheds light onto the conflicted temporal nature of the revolutionary experience.